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Guide to the Literature on Participation in the Arts

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Preface

This survey of the literature on participation in the arts was prepared as part of a study sponsored by the Wallace–Reader's Digest Funds. The study was undertaken to help build an analytic foundation for institutional efforts to attract broader audiences to their programs.

A companion report, *A New Framework for Building Participation in the Arts,* by Kevin F. McCarthy and Kimberly Jinnett, RAND, MR-1323-WRDF, 2001, analyzes the process by which individuals become involved in the arts and identifies ways in which arts institutions can influence that process. It is hoped that these reports will help arts organizations develop more-effective strategies for broadening, diversifying, and deepening participation in their programs.

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Summary

In response to broad social, economic, and technological trends that have affected the arts environment over the past 15 years, arts organizations are increasingly reaching out to the communities they serve and encouraging individuals to participate in their programs. To successfully increase participation, they must identify and understand their potential audiences and develop programs and marketing approaches that will appeal to them.

To assist in those efforts, this report presents an introduction to the best of the growing body of literature on participation-building. It is not an annotated bibliography that summarizes the contents of specific articles and books; rather, it analyzes the key contributions of the literature and provides lists of the most important books and articles on specific aspects of arts participation.

The arts-participation literature can be classified into three categories: empirical literature, theoretical literature, and practitioner literature. The empirical literature consists primarily of information from national surveys, studies by local arts institutions, and administrative data on attendance patterns. These sources differ in the methods they employ, their geographical coverage, and the frequency with which they collect data. The resulting data likewise differ in their utility for research.

Participation is defined and measured in different ways. Although it is sometimes equated with attendance at live performances, it can in fact take many forms, including participation through the media and "hands on" participation in the arts. The patterns of participation reported in the empirical literature vary, often quite sharply, depending on the form of participation. Participation patterns also typically depend on which disciplines and levels of performance are considered.

Although most empirical studies of participation examine participation patterns in the population at large, individuals can be sorted into three general groups according to their levels of participation: those who rarely if ever participate, those who occasionally participate, and those who participate frequently. It is important to distinguish which of these groups are included in a particular study, since the conclusions drawn about participation patterns will differ accordingly. This report also discusses the different metrics that are used to measure participation levels, how each describes a separate facet of participation, and how the metrics are related.

The report organizes the key findings from the empirical literature in terms of the varying aspects of participation patterns: levels and rates of participation and how they change over time; the socio-demographic correlates of participation; participation patterns across artistic disciplines; forms of participation and the extent of crossover among disciplines and modes of participation; and factors that influence individuals to become involved in the arts.

The theoretical literature on participation in the arts consists of work from economics and a wide variety of the social sciences. Economists typically approach the arts participation decision within the framework of a general theory of consumer choice in which individuals are viewed as choosing the level of arts participation that satisfies their preferences for the arts, subject to constraints of income and price. As incomes increase, participation will rise; conversely, as the price of participation rises (relative to other leisure activities), participation will fall.

Researchers in the social sciences tend to focus on the role that socio-demographic factors (education, family background, gender, and ethnicity) and psychological factors (personality) play in influencing individuals' tastes for the arts. Although an individual's taste for art is generally assumed to be determined by these factors, which are outside the economics model, some economists stress that knowledge of and prior experience with the arts increase the amount of enjoyment individuals derive from a given level of consumption and thus lead to greater participation in the arts.

Within the theoretical literature, the leisure literature offers some important insights into the factors that influence individuals' participation decisions. For example, it highlights the fact that the amount and structure of leisure time available are major factors in determining how individuals spend their leisure time. When leisure time is limited, individuals tend to select activities that enable them to choose what they do, when they do it, and how long they spend, in preference to activities that do not offer such flexibility. The leisure literature also provides insights into the behavior and motivations of art aficionados—those people who are devoted followers of the arts—by noting that some portion of the participants in all leisure activities become serious amateurs for whom the activity becomes an end it itself. Finally, decisions to participate in the arts are influenced by whether individuals are seeking entertainment or enrichment, and whether they prefer to participate alone or in groups.

This report also discusses the issues the theoretical participation literature fails to address and the problems with existing conceptual approaches. It notes, in particular, that by oversimplifying the nature of the decisionmaking process and

emphasizing the socio-demographic correlates of participation behavior rather than behavioral factors over which arts organizations may have some control, the literature fails to provide adequate practical guidance to practitioners interested in influencing participation behavior.

The third category of participation literature, practitioner literature, is specifically designed to address practitioners' concerns. This literature consists of studies that discuss general organizational strategies for building participation, studies that provide examples of various tactics organizations have used in specific circumstances and for specific artistic disciplines, and studies that discuss the importance of collecting and disseminating information.

As participation-building has become a topic of increasing interest, new sources of practical information have begun to emerge. These sources include conferences, on-line discussions and information sources, email, and other informal exchanges. For example, a Web site for disseminating information about participation-building research, strategies, and tactics (http://www.arts4allpeople.com) has recently been established by the Wallace–Reader's Digest Funds. Thus, individuals and organizations have an increasing array of sources and information from which to draw in their efforts to find new and innovative ways to build cultural participation.

Acknowledgments

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1. Introduction

In response to broad social, economic, and technological trends that have affected the arts environment over the past 15 years, arts organizations are increasingly reaching out to the communities they serve and encouraging individuals to participate in their programs. These trends include:

- Growing diversity of leisure activities, which leads to increasing competition for the limited hours of leisure time at the disposal of most Americans.
- Changing demographics, particularly the aging of the population and growing ethnic diversity.
- Technological advances that make the recorded and broadcast arts an increasingly attractive alternative to the live arts.
- Rising ticket prices for live performances.
- Variability in the total levels of funding for the arts and a shift from federal to state and local government support, along with a growing need for earned income to sustain artistic programs.
- Greater recognition of the role of the arts in building communities.

To sustain and develop their audiences in the face of these trends, arts organizations have become more strategic in their operations. They understand that it is not enough to offer excellent programs and wait for the public to walk through their doors. Indeed, many are developing an equally strong commitment to serving their communities. In the process, they are increasingly recognizing that they must identify and understand their potential audiences and develop programs and marketing approaches that will appeal to them.

Fortunately, there is a growing body of literature on participation in the arts to help inform these efforts. This report presents an introduction to the best of that literature. It is not an annotated bibliography that summarizes the contents of specific articles and books; rather, it presents an analysis of the key contributions of the literature, along with lists of the most important books and articles on specific aspects of arts participation.

We divide the literature into three classifications:

- Empirical literature—studies of participation trends based on national survey data, institutional data, and administrative data.
- Theoretical literature—studies that focus on why people decide to participate in the arts.
- Practitioner literature—books and articles written for arts practitioners to help them improve their participation-building strategies.

Chapter 2 describes the empirical literature and compares the characteristics of different types of datasets and their utility for research. It discusses the ways participation is measured and identifies the main issues addressed in the empirical studies, along with the most important findings of those studies. The chapter concludes with a list of the major works in the empirical literature.

Chapter 3 describes the theoretical literature. It presents both economic and sociological theories of individual behavior, including insights from studies of leisure behavior and their implications for arts participation. The chapter concludes with a list of key sources.

Chapter 4 addresses the practitioner literature, highlighting studies that focus on general strategies, works that present institutional case studies to illustrate effective tactics used to develop audiences, and studies that focus on ways to collect information about existing and potential participants. It concludes with a list of the most useful works for practitioners.

This guide is intended to help arts providers, funders, and researchers find the information they need to understand how to measure and identify participation trends, how to understand the motivations behind individuals' involvement in the arts, and how institutions can best influence people to make the arts a part of their lives.

2. The Empirical Literature on Participation

There is a substantial and growing body of empirical literature on public participation in the arts. This chapter describes the different sources of empirical data available on arts participation and the utility of different types of data for research. It then discusses issues concerning the definition and measurement of participation. Finally, it reviews the key findings of the empirical literature on arts participation.

Sources of Data

Three types of empirical data are available to describe and estimate patterns of public participation in the arts: survey data collected from representative samples of the national population, local surveys conducted by individual arts institutions of their audiences or market areas, and aggregate attendance data on arts participation. These three types of data differ in their purpose, methods, coverage, and utility.

Survey Data

Most of the available national survey data—i.e., individual-level information collected from representative samples of the national population—are provided by three major sources:

- The Surveys of Public Participation in the Arts (SPPA), sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA).[1]
- Various Harris poll surveys, many of which have been conducted for the advocacy group Americans for the Arts.[2]
- The periodic General Social Survey (GSS), conducted by the University of Michigan.[3]

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[1]National Endowment for the Arts, 1998.

[2]*Americans and the Arts,* 1988; *Americans and the Arts,* 1996.

[3]Available at www.umich.edu.

These surveys are designed to measure the levels and forms of individual participation in the arts. They provide detailed information not only on the extent and types of participation but also on the general social and economic characteristics of the individuals who are surveyed. In addition, they often contain comparable information on individuals' participation in non-arts leisure activities. Each of these surveys has been conducted at more or less regular intervals; thus, the information they provide also shows how participation patterns have been changing over time.

The SPPA was initially sponsored by the NEA in 1982 in response to the acknowledged need for a systematic national survey of public participation in the arts (Peterson, 1977; AMS Planning and Research, 1995). The SPPA has subsequently been fielded in 1985, 1992, and, most recently, 1997. The Harris organization has conducted national surveys of public participation in the arts periodically since the early 1970s, and the GSS has been collected over a substantial period of time.

Of these three survey sources, the SPPA data are generally regarded as the most comprehensive and reliable for estimating participation patterns at the national level. These surveys are designed specifically to collect information on national participation, so the data they provide contain detailed information on participation patterns (e.g., forms of participation by arts discipline) and on the individual correlates of those patterns.[4] Also, the wording of the SPPA questions on participation is generally more precise than that of the Harris survey questions and thus is likely to produce more reliable data.[5] Participation estimates based on the SPPA data are consistently lower than those based on the Harris data, and they appear to be more reliable than the Harris estimates (Robinson et al., 1989).

However, changes in the administration and response rates of the 1997 SPPA data raise questions as to the comparability of estimates based on this survey with those derived from earlier surveys. Specifically, changes in survey methods and a much higher refusal rate in the 1997 survey may be responsible, at least in part, for the higher participation rates reported there.[6]

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[4]The SPPA include specific questions about participation in a variety of artistic disciplines, including classical music, opera, jazz, ballet, other dance, theater, musical theater, literature, and the visual arts.

[5]For example, the SPPA ask about participation during a specific time interval, unlike the Harris surveys which, until recently, asked respondents only if they had *ever* participated in arts activities. In addition, the SPPA questions specifically exclude attendance at certain types of arts activities, e.g., school performances in which the respondents' children appear, while the Harris data include such activities.

[6]These differences in survey methods and response rates are described in the NEA's summary of the 1997 SPPA (National Endowment for the Arts, 1998).

Institutional Data

Institutional data consist of a range of information on individuals who are relevant to the institution collecting the data (DiMaggio et al., 1978). These individuals include subscribers to the institution's program, participants in its activities, or, less typically, residents of its market area. The information may be collected by a variety of means, e.g., self-administered questionnaires, focus groups, or traditional surveys. By and large, these studies are designed to inform an institution about its markets and to provide a profile of its members or attendees, the reasons for their participation, and their reaction to specific activities or programs. These surveys are more limited in geographic scope than the national surveys and are much more likely to be conducted on a one-time basis or at infrequent intervals.

Administrative Data

Administrative data are collected by the national arts service organizations from their members, usually on an annual basis. The data are typically used for administrative purposes, but they can also be used to describe aggregate attendance for specific art forms as well as changes in attendance patterns over time. Relatively comprehensive attendance data are available for dance, nonprofit theater, Broadway and touring commercial theater, opera, and classical music.[7]

Although these data are available from individual arts service organizations, they are not always available in published form. The most comprehensive and accessible collection can be found in the various *Statistical Abstracts* published by the U.S. Bureau of the Census (U.S. Bureau of Census, 1998).

One problem with using administrative data is that the classifications used to present them often change, making direct comparisons over time and across disciplines difficult. The data are typically provided voluntarily by individual arts organizations, so the number of institutions that provide them change periodically, and the reporting categories also change. Nevertheless, these institutions are the only available sources of aggregate attendance data.

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[7]Data on dance are provided by Dance USA; on nonprofit theater, by The Theater Communications Group; on Broadway and touring commercial theater, by Theater Facts; on opera, by Opera America; and on classical music, by The American Symphony Orchestra League.

Utility of Empirical Data for Research

Given the differences among the various sources in methods, geographic coverage, and temporal frequency, it should not be surprising that data from them also differ in terms of their utility for research purposes.

For example, the data differ in terms of their ability to reveal patterns of participation among the population in general (participants and nonparticipants), the population of participants, and total arts attendance (the number of participants multiplied by their frequency of participation). National surveys can be used to describe each of these populations, whereas organizational data can only describe more-limited populations, such as subscribers or numbers of attendees. And even the national attendance data reflect only those who actually visit the institutions from which the data are collected. These distinctions are important because the empirical literature on participation indicates clearly that the general population can be sorted into three distinct groups with regard to their level of participation in the arts: those who rarely participate, those who participate only occasionally, and those who are frequent participants (McCarthy et al., 2001; McCarthy and Jinnett, 2001). Frequent participants are likely to be disproportionately represented in both institutional and aggregate attendance data (Schuster, 1991).

Measuring Participation

When reviewing empirical studies of participation, it is important to be clear about precisely what is meant by participation and how it is being measured. In this section, we discuss three definitional issues: what types of activities constitute participation, what arts disciplines are included, and how the population is defined. We then discuss the various measures of participation and their characteristics.

Defining Participation

Modes of Participation. Although participation in the arts is sometimes equated only with attending a performance or visiting a museum, people actually participate in the arts in many different ways. For some individuals, for example, participation means being directly involved in the arts in a hands-on way, such as playing an instrument, singing in a choir, painting a picture, or writing a poem. For others, participation means attending a live performance, visiting an art museum or gallery, or reading or reciting poetry. For still others, participation means listening to a recording or watching a televised play or a program about

painting. In sum, participation may mean "doing," attending, or participating through the media.

These distinctions are important because they influence the conclusions that can be drawn about how many people participate and the characteristics of those participants. Almost without exception, the empirical literature shows that more people participate in the arts through the media than by attending live performances or visiting museums; and many more people participate through attendance than by engaging in the arts in a hands-on way (National Endowment for the Arts, 1998; *Americans and the Arts*, 1996; AMS Planning and Research, 1995).

Similarly, the answers to questions about which subgroups within the population are most likely to participate in the arts and the differences in frequency of participation among socio-demographic groups are likely to vary across forms of participation. Differences in participation level, for example, are more closely related to education level than to any other socio-demographic characteristic (Robinson et al., 1985), but the strength of that relationship appears to vary depending on the form of participation. In general, the differences in participation levels of individuals with very low levels of education and those with very high levels are greatest in comparisons of attendance, somewhat less pronounced in comparisons of "doing," and least marked in comparisons of participation through the media (National Endowment for the Arts, 1998). The strength of other socio-demographic factors in distinguishing among participation levels also varies across forms of participation. Age, for example, plays a much more important role in differentiating the population of participants who "do" art than it does in differentiating those who attend or participate through the media (Peterson, 1977).

Disciplines. There are three dimensions to be considered in determining the disciplines included in comparisons of participation rates. The first concerns how the arts are defined. Although virtually all researchers include the so-called "benchmark" arts (opera, dance, theater, and music) within their definition, there is much less agreement about the commercial arts (film, radio, and television). Second, even within these general categories, a distinction is sometimes drawn between levels of performance. The SPPA, for example, generally excludes amateur arts and crafts from the base upon which they calculate participation rates (National Endowment for the Arts, 1998). This distinction is important because, as Walker et al. (2000) point out, the broader the definition of the arts, the higher the level of participation. The third dimension concerns the differences among participation rates for various disciplines. These differences are particularly pronounced when comparing attendance patterns. In general,

attendance is lowest for ballet and opera, intermediate for classical music and jazz, somewhat higher for drama and musicals, and considerably higher for art museums and literature (National Endowment for the Arts, 1998). Thus, the level of participation reported varies according to which disciplines are included (Tepper, 1998). One approach to this problem is to report participation figures for only the benchmark arts. However, such comparisons may obscure more than they reveal, to the extent that participation trends across disciplines are moving at different rates or even in different directions. Moreover, few comparisons of participation patterns disaggregate disciplines into finer classifications, e.g., they do not disaggregate dance patterns among folk, modern, and ballet, or music patterns beyond classical and jazz.

Populations. The population included in analyses of participation rates can be sorted into three general categories: those who rarely participate, those who participate occasionally, and those who participate frequently (McCarthy et al., 2001). It is important to distinguish which groups are likely to be represented in the comparisons of participation patterns and the degree to which they are represented (Schuster, 1991). Comparisons of participation patterns among the general population include each of these groups roughly in proportion to their share of the population. Comparisons of participants (e.g., those who have participated in the last year) generally exclude rare participants and weigh occasional and frequent participants equally.[8] Finally, comparisons of attendees or visitors at an arts institution are unlikely to contain rare participants, somewhat more likely to contain occasional participants, and very likely to contain frequent participants, since the frequent participants are much more likely to be in attendance on any given day. Indeed, if the attendance data are collected over a period of time, they are very likely to include frequent participants multiple times.

These distinctions are important because the conclusions drawn about participation levels and their correlates will be directly affected by which populations are being compared. Profiles drawing on samples of the total population will give an accurate picture of the differences between participants and nonparticipants, but they will not necessarily yield an accurate picture of the typical visitor to an arts institution, since they weigh each segment of the population equally. Profiles drawing on the samples of visitors, on the other hand, may yield accurate pictures of the average daily visitor, but they should not be used to distinguish between the general characteristics of participants and

[8]That is, occasional and frequent participants are both counted as single participants, regardless of the fact that frequent participants will have participated many more times, on average, within a given year.

those of nonparticipants, since they are likely to contain a much higher percentage of frequent visitors. Because the characteristics of frequent visitors often differ sharply from those of others, this is an important point to keep in mind when comparing the results of the empirical literature. Neither perspective is inherently superior to the other; their value depends on the purpose of the comparison.

Measures of Participation

In addition to understanding how participation is defined, it is important to understand how it is measured. Although a variety of measures can be used to describe participation patterns, three metrics are typically used to measure participation levels:

- The absolute level of participation, typically measured only in terms of the total amount of participation—e.g., the total number of visits to museums in the past year.
- The rate of participation within a given period, typically reported as a percentage of the total population that participated—e.g., visited a museum—during that period.
- The frequency of participation among those who participate—e.g., the average number of visits that participants made to museums within the past year.

Each of these metrics tells us something different: Changes in total participation levels address the question of how the overall level of participation is changing, but they do not tell us why the changes have occurred. Changes in the rate of participation reveal whether there are more people participating now than in the past, but they do not tell us whether participants have changed their behavior and are becoming involved more or less often. Finally, changes in the frequency of participation tell us whether the behavior of participants has changed and, if so, how it has changed.

These distinctions are important, not only because they describe different concepts, but also because they can have very different implications. This point can be demonstrated by considering how the concepts are related. The total level of participation, e.g., total attendance figures for a particular institution, is determined by multiplying the total number of visitors to the institution by the average number of visits each visitor makes. Thus, a change in the total number of visits could be the result of a change in either the number of visitors or the average number of visits per visitor. Most arts institutions want to increase both

the number of participants and the frequency with which they participate. However, the implications of changes in these two components of total attendance may be quite different. If the change in total attendance is due to an increasing number of visitors, the institution may be broadening its reach within the population and attracting more participants. On the other hand, an increase in attendance due to an increase in frequency suggests that the institution is strengthening the involvement of its current participants.

Moreover, the number of participants, when expressed as a participation rate (that is, as a fraction of some population), can actually be determined by multiplying the rate at which the population participates by the size of that population. In this case, the change in the number of visitors might be due to either a change in participation behavior within the population or a change in the size of the population. The former represents a change in behavior, while the latter may simply reflect growth or decline in the population.

In practice, participation rates are typically defined not only for the total population but also for subgroups within the population. As noted above, for example, participation in the arts is highly correlated with education levels. Thus, we might want to examine changes in participation rates, controlling for education levels. In this case, we could determine rates of participation for a particular educational group by multiplying the rate of participation for that group by the number of people in it. Since the relative size of the population at different educational levels can change—indeed, educational levels in the United States have risen steadily over the past few decades—this further disaggregation of participation patterns distinguishes behavioral changes not only from changes in the size of the population but also from changes in population composition, e.g., increasing educational levels.

In fact, changes in total attendance levels may be due to any one of four different factors: changes in the size of the population, changes in the composition of the population, changes in the rate of participation among specific subgroups of the population, and changes in the frequency of attendance for those subgroups. Understanding these distinctions allows one to recognize that the conclusions drawn about how and why participation patterns may be changing will differ depending upon the mechanism driving the change. Changes due to growth in the size of the population or shifts in its composition do not represent behavioral changes at all but are by-products of broader societal shifts. On the other hand, changes in participation rates suggest that changes in absolute levels of participation are the result of a broadening of interest in the arts. Changes in participation rates caused by changes in the frequency of participation suggest

not that more people are interested in the arts, but rather that current participants have changed their behavior.

Main Findings of Empirical Studies

The empirical literature examines various aspects of participation, including

- Levels and rates of participation and how they change over time.
- Socio-demographic correlates of participation.
- Participation patterns in particular artistic disciplines.
- Forms of participation and the extent of crossover among disciplines and modes of participation.
- Factors that influence individuals to become involved in the arts.

Although these studies differ in focus, they tend to address the *who*, *what*, and *how* of arts participation, rather than *why* people behave as they do. The vast majority of these studies do not address why individuals choose to participate in the arts or why they choose a particular art form or mode of participation. As a result, although they are certainly informative and add to our understanding of participation patterns, these studies limit the practical lessons that can be drawn by arts institutions attempting to increase participation. We will return to this issue in Chapter 3, which reviews the theoretical literature.

The discussion that follows focuses primarily on studies that use SPPA data. As indicated earlier, the SPPA data are generally believed to produce the most reliable estimates of participation, and they provide by far the most information on the characteristics of participants, their forms of participation, and the circumstances of that participation. Thus, they support the most detailed analyses of the topics considered here.

Research studies based on SPPA data, however, can go only so far. As noted earlier, the first SPPA survey was conducted in 1982, and very limited systematic information on participation patterns before that time is available.[9] Indeed, attempts to describe earlier participation patterns must typically rely on administrative data. Moreover, the most recent SPPA data (the 1997 survey) have only recently been released, so they are not included in most of the analyses.

[9]Ford Foundation, *The Finances of the Performing Arts* (1974), the second volume of which contains a very useful analysis of participation patterns, represents a singular exception to this observation. However, this study was conducted only once and thus is of limited utility for describing trends in participation.

Participation Levels and Trends

The arts are a popular leisure-time activity for a large proportion of the population. According to recent survey data (National Endowment for the Arts, 1998), about 50 percent of all adults in the United States attended a performance of one of the seven performing arts (jazz, classical music, opera, musicals, nonmusical plays, ballet, and other dance) or visited an art museum in the previous year. Although the attendance rates for this form of participation are below those for more popular leisure activities—such as watching television (which is virtually universal) and attending films—they nonetheless compare favorably with those for attending sports events or going to amusement parks.[10]

The survey data also show that more than 75 percent of the adult U.S. population watched or listened to an arts performance or a program about the arts through the media, and about 65 percent participated through hands-on experiences such as playing an instrument, painting or sculpting, writing, or taking photographs.[11] These latter activities are comparable in popularity to such non-arts activities as gardening, exercising, and camping.

Because longitudinal studies of participation require repeated surveys of participation patterns, the first systematic studies of trends in participation patterns date from the 1970s Harris polls and the 1982 SPPA surveys (Robinson et al., 1985; AMS Planning and Research, 1996; *Americans and the Arts*, 1988). Unfortunately, differences in survey methodology and sampling approaches have produced inconsistent results. Estimates based on the Harris data, for example, are routinely higher than those based on the SPPA data—often by a significant margin (Tepper, 1998).

The same type of variation exists when comparing participation patterns over time. Comparisons of numbers of attendees or attendances indicate a steady, if modest, increase in participation from 1982 to 1992 (Robinson, 1993). However, attendance figures are aggregate numbers that are a product of changes in both behavior and the growth and composition of the population, and most of the increases in attendance (whether expressed in terms of rates or numbers) are the result of population growth and the increasing educational distribution of the American population. Indeed, participation rates within groups of the

[10]The SPPA contain information on a variety of popular leisure-time activities in addition to the arts and can thus be used to compare Americans' participation in the arts with their participation in these other activities (National Endowment for the Arts, 1998).

[11]These rates of participation, based on SPPA data, are generally lower than estimates based on the Harris data for the same general classes of the arts (*Americans and the Arts*, 1988).

population defined by education level show very little or no increase between 1982 and 1992 (McCarthy et al., 2001).

The most recent SPPA data, on the other hand, suggest that all forms of participation across all disciplines have risen since 1992 (National Endowment for the Arts, 1998). However, because of the difference in survey procedures and response rates between the 1992 and 1997 SPPA surveys, it is unclear whether or not this increase reflects actual changes in behavior. Indeed, although the 1997 SPPA data show increases since 1992, comparable estimates based on the Harris data suggest that participation rates may actually have declined slightly.

In sum, the literature on participation levels consistently shows differences across forms of participation and discipline but leaves open the question of how much differences in these numbers over time represent a real change in attendance behavior rather than changes in survey methodology and response rates or changes in the size and composition of the population.

Correlates of Participation

Virtually all of the empirical studies include some analysis of the individual characteristics associated with being a participant in the arts, focusing on differences in participation rates (however defined) across a wide range of socio-demographic characteristics (Robinson, 1993). Some of these studies simply look at zero-order effects (that is, they do not control for the fact that several of the characteristics, such as education and income, are related). Others report partial correlations (i.e., they adjust for the correlations among independent factors). By and large, however, the range of factors considered is consistent across studies and reflects the range of variables in the SPPA data, including age, gender, race, ethnicity, income, education, occupation, and previous arts education.

Of these characteristics, education is by far the most closely correlated with participation in the arts, regardless of form or discipline (National Endowment for the Arts, 1998; Robinson, 1993; Schuster, 1991). Individuals with higher levels of education, particularly those with college and graduate degrees, have much higher participation rates than individuals with less education. However, this connection appears to be stronger for those who participate through attendance rather than through the media and is least pronounced for hands-on participants (National Endowment for the Arts, 1998).

What drives this education effect is not altogether clear. Highly educated individuals are more likely to have been exposed to the arts during the course of their education, and familiarity with and knowledge of the arts are directly

related to arts participation. (This is also the case for most types of leisure activities, i.e., the more familiarity and knowledge, the more participation. (Kelley and Freisinger, 2000).) Education also helps individuals develop skills for dealing with the abstract—skills that are useful for appreciating the arts (Toffler, 1964). The fact that the effects of education appear to be most pronounced in comparisons of attendance, which is the most social form of participation, suggests that social factors such as prestige, the influence of friends and relatives, and what those friends and relatives view as preferred forms of entertainment are also important.

The findings for other socio-economic background factors are more ambiguous. While gender and age have some effect, they are less important than education. Age appears to have a more pronounced effect on hands-on participation rates than on the other participation rates (Peters and Cherbo, 1996), since younger people are more likely to be involved in playing musical instruments or appearing in performances than older people. Rates of attendance and participation through the media do not vary significantly with age, after controlling for other factors, except beyond the age of 65 (Balfe and Meyerson, 1995). Other factors such as marital status, political ideology, income, and race all appear at first glance to be associated with differences in participation rates, but their effects tend to disappear when education is controlled for (DiMaggio and Ostrower, 1987). This point underscores the importance of education as the personal characteristic most closely associated with arts participation.

The literature also examines the relationship between participation and background factors such as arts education and contact with the arts as a child (Bergonzi and Smith, 1996; Orend and Keegan, 1996). Both of these factors have been shown to be strongly associated with increased participation, even after education levels are controlled for. Orend and Keegan suggest that the effects of arts socialization (in the form of arts education classes and more contact with the arts) are particularly important in explaining differences in participation rates among those with lower levels of education.

Finally, studies of the frequency with which the population participates in the arts indicate that the distribution is highly skewed: A relatively small percentage of the population accounts for the vast majority of total arts participation (Robinson et al., 1985; Robinson, 1993; Schuster, 1991). Interestingly, the correlation between participation and higher education levels is less pronounced among frequent participants. More highly educated frequent participants do attend somewhat more than frequent attendees with lower education levels, but this difference in not as pronounced as the educational difference between more-frequent and less-frequent participants (National Endowment for the Arts, 1998).

Such studies of the correlates of participation suffer from two major drawbacks, one substantive and the other practical. Substantively, although the individual correlates of participation may suggest why individuals participate in the arts, they are not—nor can they be—definitive. For example, although well-educated individuals are much more likely to participate in the arts than are those with less education, not all well-educated people participate, while some less-educated people are frequent participants. In other words, education does not "explain" participation. The practical drawback of these studies of correlation is that since many of these factors, education being a classic example, are beyond the control of arts organizations interested in increasing participation levels, the studies offer little guidance for institutions concerned with building audiences.

Participation Patterns by Discipline

Most of the empirical studies examine participation patterns across a broad range of artistic disciplines. A growing number of studies, however, are looking at participation patterns and trends within specific disciplines (Deveaux, 1994; Holak et al., 1986; Keagan, 1987; Lemmons, 1966; Schuster, 1991; Zill and Winglee, 1988), including all those about which questions are asked in the SPPA—ballet, opera, classical music, jazz, and theater—as well as in the visual and literary arts. Like other participation studies, these studies report participation levels and trends over time as well as the correlates of participation.

Some studies have also addressed the relative preferences for different artistic disciplines by comparing participation rates across those disciplines. Although estimated rates of participation by discipline vary depending upon datasets and time period, the rank order is remarkably stable: Among the performing arts, ballet and opera draw fewer participants than do classical music and jazz, which in turn attract a smaller percentage of participants than do either musical or traditional theater. Moreover, the visual and literary arts (defined to include both fiction and poetry) consistently attract more participants than do the performing arts (National Endowment for the Arts, 1998).

Very little is known about why participants choose one type of art over another. The literature on individual motivations (discussed below) indicates that interest in the material to be presented is a relatively important factor in the decision to attend a specific performance (Ford Foundation, 1974), but this fact does not explain why an individual chooses one type of art rather than another. The relevance of the programmed material to the individual is also likely to play a

role, but this connection has not been studied. Finally, an individual's ability to tailor participation to his or her own schedule or tastes may also play a role.[12]

Participation Patterns by Form of Participation

Individuals participate in the arts not only by attending live events or visiting art museums, but also through the media (i.e., watching the arts on television, listening to the radio, or playing recorded music) or by playing an instrument, writing a book or poem, or painting (Gray, 1995). Studies of participation patterns show that participation through the media is much more common than participation through attending arts events, and that attending is more common than doing (National Endowment for the Arts, 1998; Robinson, 1993; McCarthy et al., 2001). This pattern is found across all artistic disciplines.

Most of the increase in total attendance at the performing arts over the past few decades appears to be due to population growth and increasing education levels—attendance *rates* have been more stable than *total* attendance (McCarthy et al., 2001). In contrast, attendance rates at art museums have climbed steadily since the NEA first began conducting the SPPA (National Endowment for the Arts, 1998). Participation in the arts through the media—with the possible exception of broadcast theatrical performances—also appears to be increasing (McCarthy et al., 2001). Although rates of hands-on participation appeared to be higher in the latest SPPA survey, it is unclear whether this pattern is a result of changes in survey procedures or an actual increase in direct participation rates.

The literature does not specifically address why some forms of participation are more popular than others, but the answer may be related in part to ready availability. Watching television (which consumes about three hours of every American's day, according to Robinson and Godbey, 1997) and listening to the radio are ideally suited to filling small bits of time, can be done simultaneously with other activities, and are possible at almost any time for most people. Thus, participation through the media can be fit into most peoples' schedules, more or less by choice. Hands-on activities are also flexible, but attending live performances, which are usually scheduled for specific times and places, is much less so.

Crossover effects must also be considered in comparing participation levels across forms of participation. Crossover effects in arts participation could come

[12] It is interesting to note that art museums, which have higher attendance rates than any of the performing arts, offer greater flexibility in terms of the hours they are open and the material they present.

about in one of two ways: (1) a person who participates in the arts through one form may be more inclined to participate in another form as well—e.g., a person who participates through the media (say, watches arts programs on television) may be more apt to attend live performances; and (2) a person who participates in one type of art may be more inclined to participate in another—e.g., the person who attends live symphony performances may be more inclined to attend musicals. A major study of crossover effects in the arts (Love, 1995), however, suggests that such effects are more the exception than the rule. This study found that with a few notable exceptions—e.g., jazz lovers are very likely to attend performances, listen to recordings, and watch programs about jazz, and people who watch television programs about one type of art are very likely to watch programs about other types—crossover effects are not typical of arts participation.[13]

Motivations for Participation

To understand individuals' motivations for participating, we must consider three questions: Why do people participate in the arts rather than in other leisure activities? Why do they participate in different ways? And why do they choose specific types of arts? Each of these questions addresses a different aspect of participation. The first relates to overall levels of demand; the other two refer to the ways that demand is distributed by form of participation and type of art. The empirical literature focuses on the first question but rarely addresses the other two.

The most comprehensive study of reasons individuals cite for their decisions to participate or not to participate was conducted for the Ford Foundation in 1974 (Ford Foundation, 1974). This study, which has not been repeated, asked respondents to rate the importance they attached to 29 different attributes of the arts. They rated the importance of each attribute to their participation and the degree to which they associated that characteristic with specific arts. This range of attributes is much wider than that reported in the SPPA data and thus allows for more-comprehensive comparisons. It also allows analysis of the degree to which people perceive particular characteristics to be associated with different

[13]It should be noted, however, that the structure of these comparisons may have influenced this result. Love compared the percentage of people who participated in the more-frequent activity (participation through the media) with the percentage of those who also attended live performances and found a low correlation. The results may have been somewhat different had he focused on the percentage of people in the less-frequent activity (attending live performances) who also participated through the media.

disciplines.[14] The study found that quality of performance, cost, atmosphere, and the nature of the experience are the most important factors affecting attendance levels.

By and large, studies of participants' motivation for participation highlight a variety of practical and contextual factors—e.g., cost, availability, information, scheduling—that drive individual decisions (National Endowment for the Arts, 1998; Robinson, 1993). Interestingly, the importance attached to these factors appears to depend upon whether the individual is a rare, occasional, or frequent participant in the arts. Those who frequently attend but would like to attend more are most likely to cite practical factors as an important consideration. For those who attend occasionally or rarely, these factors are less important (Schuster, 1991). This finding suggests that the participation behaviors of frequent, occasional, and rare participants may be motivated by different factors.

In addition to studies of individual decisions, the empirical literature includes aggregate-level studies seeking to explain shifts that drive the demand for the arts (Urice, 1992; Butsch, 2000; Toffler, 1964). Four sets of factors in particular have been used to explain changes in overall participation: changes in the population's size and composition; changes in people's taste for the arts; changes in practical factors (such as availability, income, prices, and time) that affect individuals' ability to realize their preferences for the arts; and changes in the stock of knowledge about the arts. These factors affect participation in expected ways. For example, arts participation has been shown to increase as the population grows, as education levels increase, as the arts become more available or less expensive relative to other leisure activities, and as more people are exposed to the arts as children or in school. Understanding the dynamic behind changes in tastes is less straightforward because it relates to a question not typically addressed in the empirical literature: What are the underlying determinants of individual tastes?

Indeed, comprehensive explanations for participation behavior are much more likely to be found in the theoretical literature.

Selected Citations

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[14]Unfortunately, the Ford study was conducted in only 12 cities and cannot be generalized to the national population.

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3. The Theoretical Literature[1]

Compared to the empirical literature on arts participation, the theoretical literature is much less extensive. The social sciences in general have not been particularly successful in constructing theories that systematically explain participation behavior. The most comprehensive work can be found in the economics literature, which approaches participation decisions within the framework of a general model of consumer behavior (Heilbrun and Gray, 1993). Most of the theoretical work within the other social science disciplines can be viewed as complementing the economics approach by focusing on the determinants of individual tastes. The research literature on leisure, while not offering a comprehensive framework for explaining arts behavior, does offer several important insights into that behavior.

The key methodological distinction between the descriptive and theoretical literatures is in their approaches. Descriptive studies begin with the data and seek to identify patterns in those data with which to describe patterns of participation behavior and its correlates. Theoretical studies begin with a formal model that seeks to explain participation patterns in terms of underlying theory. In practice, the key distinction between these two classes of studies is that the descriptive approach focuses on those characteristics that might explain individuals' tastes or preferences for the arts, while theoretical studies view tastes as simply one factor affecting individuals' decisions to participate. The descriptive approach is more typical of social science studies; the theoretical approach is more characteristic of economics studies.

Economic Approaches

In the traditional economic approach to participation behavior, individuals are assumed to be rational consumers who seek to maximize satisfaction (utility) by choosing a level of arts participation that satisfies their preferences for the arts, subject to constraints of income and price (Heilbrun and Gray, 1993). An individual's preferences, or tastes, are assumed to be fixed and to depend on a host of individual characteristics (socio-demographic and psychological factors) largely assumed to be "outside" the model.

[1]Much of the material in this chapter is taken from McCarthy and Jinnett (2001).

Income and price play the key roles in this model. In general, as the price of participation increases, individuals participate less. *Price* here refers to the price of arts participation and related activities (e.g., admission costs, transportation, childcare) and the price of alternative goods or leisure activities that are "substitutes" for arts participation. Thus, the level of arts participation depends on the price of participation relative to the price of substitute leisure activities (Throsby and Winter, 1979; Vogel, 2000; Nardone, 1982).

Conversely, as income rises, participation should rise. However, the direct effects of rising income may be partly offset by the "opportunity costs" of participation—i.e., the earnings forgone by spending one's time participating in the arts rather than working. The tradeoff between the direct (and positive) earnings effect and the indirect (and negative) opportunity-cost effect varies with an individual's preference for the arts relative to other goods and leisure activities and with his or her income level. The greater an individual's taste for the arts, the more likely the income effect will dominate. In addition, the opportunity-cost effect appears to dominate at lower and moderate income levels, whereas the income effect dominates at higher income levels—a pattern that helps explain higher participation levels among higher-income (and thus among better-educated) individuals (Felton, 1992).

Stigler and Becker (1977) offer a reformulation of the traditional economics model. They suggest that the satisfaction and enjoyment individuals derive from the arts depend not only on income, price, and tastes but also on such factors as prior artistic experience, knowledge of the arts, education, and family background (which are normally viewed as correlates of taste), which allow individuals to become more effective consumers of the arts. In other words, the more experience and familiarity an individual has with the arts, the more enjoyment he or she is able to derive from a particular level of consumption.

The economics literature offers two important insights into the arts participation decision. First, it highlights the role that practical factors such as price, income, information, and leisure alternatives play in individuals' participation decisions. For example, as the price of arts participation increases (either directly, in the form of higher admissions and related costs, or indirectly, in the form of its relationship to the price of other leisure activities), participation will decline. Also, as consumers gain more information on the availability and prices of arts activities relative to those of other leisure activities, participation rates will change, the direction of the change depending on the outcome of the comparison. And as the range of substitute leisure activities expands, arts participation will be affected by the individual's having more alternatives to choose from.

The second insight from the economics literature is the idea that the more knowledgeable people are about the arts, the more likely they are to participate, because they gain more satisfaction and enjoyment from a given level of consumption than do people who are less knowledgeable. This effect provides a potential explanation for why participation levels vary as sharply as they do among rare, occasional, and frequent arts consumers. It also helps to explain why some people use the term *addiction* for the love that art aficionados (those who are enthusiastic fans of the arts) have for the arts.

A variant of the economic approach uses an institutional perspective by assuming that the satisfaction individuals obtain from the arts derives as much from the instrumental benefits of arts participation as from direct enjoyment per se (Veblen, 1899). This approach assumes that a primary reason for participating in the arts is that individuals perceive consumption of the "high arts" as characteristic of the upper economic classes. Thus, participation in the arts is a way of demonstrating social status. This approach foreshadows the work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1984), who viewed the arts as a mechanism for transmitting cultural capital—a key element in the stratification structure of developed societies.

Other Conceptual Approaches

As indicated above, noneconomic studies of arts participation are apt to pursue a descriptive rather than a conceptual approach. However, these studies can be viewed as complementing the economic approach by focusing on the empirical correlates of participation as proxies for individual tastes. Thus, the work of sociologists who focus on such socio-demographic correlates of participation as education, family background, gender, and ethnicity can be viewed as identifying the background characteristics that determine individuals' tastes. Similarly, psychologists, who focus on personality and related individual characteristics, can be viewed as elucidating the psychological factors that may predispose individuals to participate in the arts.[2]

Perhaps the most useful body of conceptual literature on participation is the interdisciplinary work on leisure activity (Kelley, 1987). Although this literature does not offer a fully integrated theory of participation, it provides several important concepts for understanding individuals' arts participation decisions.

[2]A particularly interesting example of this approach is the work of Zaltman (1998), who has identified a basic set of constructs, metaphors, and themes that individuals use to describe their experiences with the arts. As Zaltman suggests, these themes provide considerable insight into the way the arts resonate with people on a deep psychological level.

These concepts are particularly useful for addressing those motivational issues that, as we noted above, have not been adequately dealt with in the empirical literature: relative preferences for the arts versus other leisure activities, for particular types of art, and for particular forms of participation.

For example, the leisure literature identifies the amount and nature of the leisure time available to an individual as being central to his or her leisure choices. Underlying this point is the recognition that an individual's time can be used in one of three ways (Robinson and Godbey, 1997): for work and work-related activities (e.g., commuting), for the basic necessities of life (e.g., sleeping, eating, dressing), and for discretionary, or leisure, activities. Since the amount of time in a day is fixed, more time spent in any one of these ways means less available time for the other two. Moreover, because the amount of time an individual spends tending to life's basic necessities is relatively fixed, the major tradeoff tends to be between work and leisure.

How an individual chooses to spend his or her leisure time will be directly influenced by the amount of that time and how it is structured. As the amount of leisure time decreases, the opportunity costs of that time will increase and the individual will thus become more selective. As an individual's leisure time becomes increasingly fragmented—whether due to irregular work schedules, family responsibilities, or something else—he or she is likely to become increasingly selective about how to use any "free" time. Leisure activities that do not fit into the busy schedule will lose out, while those that are most adaptable to it will become more popular. Robinson and Godbey (1997) refer to this phenomenon as "leisure by appointment" and suggest that it has become increasingly common.

A major reason for this pattern may well be the changing availability and increasing fragmentation of leisure time in U.S. society. Although the growth in leisure time enjoyed in the United States for much of the 20th century has reversed for some segments of the population, it is unclear whether it has done so for Americans in general. Robinson and Godbey (1997) argue that with a few notable exceptions, Americans now have as much available leisure time as they did in the past. Schor (1991) argues the reverse. Most observers do agree, however, that the structure of leisure time has become more fragmented as a result of increasingly irregular work schedules in the United States (Vogel, 2000), and that this phenomenon is especially true for the more highly educated, who are the heaviest consumers of the arts.

According to Putnam (2000), the perception of reduced leisure time and a growing focus on home-centered leisure activities have increased the competition

that the arts, especially the live performing arts, face from other leisure activities. Although the emphasis in the leisure literature is on how leisure-time constraints affect the choice between participating in the arts and participation in other leisure activities, these constraints also affect choices among types of art. As we suggested earlier, the observed differences in attendance rates may be due to the flexibility offered by specific activities. An individual visiting an art museum can choose when to visit, how much time to spend, and what to view and not to view. An individual attending a live event does not have this same flexibility, since live events usually take place at a specific time, last for a specific duration, and present a set program.

A second contribution of the leisure literature is the insight it offers into the motivations of arts aficionados—those people who are devoted followers of the arts. Unlike the economics literature, which explains the arts aficionado phenomenon in terms of the increasing satisfaction that familiarity with the arts brings, the leisure literature tends to view it more in psychological terms: A small fraction of the participants in leisure activities become serious "amateurs" for whom the activity becomes an end in itself (Stebbins, 1992). As Kelley and Freysinger (2000) point out, this phenomenon is common to a wide range of leisure activities in which there is a progression in commitment to the activity. As their commitment grows, the individuals come to define themselves in terms of the activity, or in their words, "It becomes central to who one is" (Kelley and Freysinger, 2000, pp. 82–83). Indeed, the individual sometimes becomes part of a community of individuals, most of whom enjoy this same activity. This type of community of interest has also been identified by Putnam (2000) as a major need in current U.S. society.

A final important insight that the leisure literature offers concerns the factors that influence an individual's decision about how to participate—i.e., through attendance, the media, or hands-on engagement. One suggestion from the literature is that a useful framework for analyzing this decision is to consider two different dimensions of a person's choices: Is this person primarily seeking entertainment or fulfillment? Does he or she prefer to participate alone or with others? (Kelley and Freysinger, 2000; Kelley, 1987). The first of these dimensions distinguishes between activities primarily undertaken as a form of entertainment, such as watching television (Robinson and Godbey, 1997), and those undertaken for enrichment or self-fulfillment, or what has been referred to as "serious leisure" (Stebbins, 1992). The second dimension pertains to the social context: Is the social experience equally as or more important than the activity itself, or is the individual's main motivation self-focused—i.e., is he or she primarily interested in developing proficiency in the activity?

Combined, these two dimensions provide a framework for distinguishing among different types of arts participants (see Figure 3.1). Within the group of individuals primarily seeking entertainment, those who are self-focused will be more inclined to participate through the media (by, for example, listening to recorded music or watching a play on television), and those seeking a social experience, the "casual attendees," will be more inclined to attend a live performance. Within the group primarily desiring enrichment and self-fulfillment, the self-focused will be inclined to engage in hands-on activities, and those seeking the social experience will be "aficionado attendees."

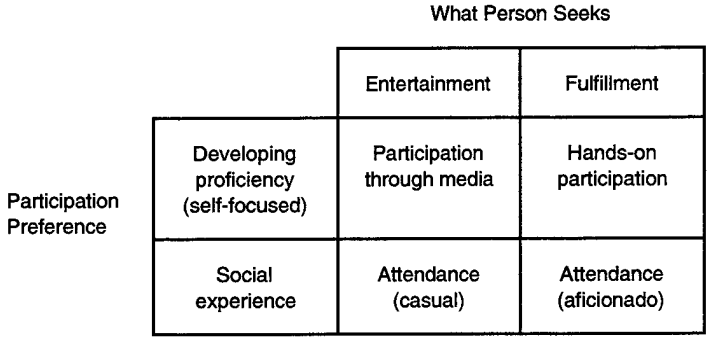

Figure 3.1—Framework Explaining Forms of Participation

People falling into a particular cell of this classification scheme are not precluded from participating in other ways. Those who participate in the arts primarily through the media may also attend live performances, as may hands-on participants. Moreover, regardless of their form of participation, individuals will also choose from the various art forms, both the high and the more popular. However, this basic scheme provides a useful way of recognizing that individuals' motivations for participation and the predominant form that participation is likely to take will differ and that these differences are important to bear in mind when developing an outreach strategy.

These differences may be particularly useful for arts institutions seeking to increase attendance at live performances. For example, the scheme suggests that the market for live performing arts consists of two distinct groups, casual attendees and aficionados. Casual attendees differ from aficionados not only in their motivations but also in their numbers, knowledge of the arts, and, in all probability, their tastes. The aficionados are the frequent attendees discussed above. They are a small, select group of people likely to be knowledgeable about and interested in a diverse array of content. The casual attendees, in contrast, are

likely to be far more numerous, less interested in the art form per se, and more likely to be attracted to programming that is more traditional or that relates directly to their daily lives.

These findings suggest several points for arts institutions to consider when developing strategies to increase participation. First, they need to be mindful of how their activities fit into the schedules of their target populations. Second, they need to be aware that potential participants have many leisure activity options (both art and non-art) open to them and thus need to know how their institutions' offerings compare with those other options. Third, given potential participants' limited leisure time and increasing entertainment options, arts institutions must consider the nature of the target groups, their motivations, and how the institutions' programming relates to those motivations. These insights suggest that very different engagement strategies may be needed to increase participation by those who rarely (if ever) participate in the arts, those who participate occasionally, and those who participate frequently. Finally, arts institutions must realize that the process of converting individuals from rare to occasional to frequent participants is likely to require a significant transformation in those individuals' commitment to the arts and that this process is likely to take a long time (Morrison and Dalgleish, 1987). However, once the transformation occurs, those individuals may well become part of an institution's community and, as such, will be not only habitual attendees but also volunteers, contributors, and board members.

Critique of Participation Literature

Despite providing a variety of information about participation behavior and its dynamics, the participation literature is unlikely to provide adequate guidance for arts institutions interested in building participation, for two reasons. First, it leaves many important questions about participation behavior unanswered; second, and more important, it fails to capture the complexity of the decision-making process. In fact, the complexity of the participation behavior documented in the empirical literature is not even reflected in the conceptual approaches presented in the theoretical literature.

Unanswered Questions

Given limited data and the tendency of those data to focus more on description than on explanation, the literature's having largely ignored several issues about participation is probably not surprising. As noted above, very little is known about why individuals prefer one type of art activity to another or why they

choose one form of arts participation over another. Nor does anyone really understand much about the reasons individuals cite for their participation decisions. How does one explain, for example, the diversity of those reasons?

Moreover, it is not known how certain factors that have been demonstrated to be correlated with participation behavior actually operate. For example, education has been found to be strongly associated with arts participation, but why this is so is unclear. We cannot explain, for example, why even though most regular arts participants are highly educated, not all well-educated individuals are arts participants, or why many less-well-educated individuals are regular arts participants. The same general point can be made about any of the factors that are correlated with participation, most notably arts education and exposure to the arts as a child. Although these various socio-demographic factors are assumed to be proxies for differences in taste for the arts, we do not understand the underlying determinants of tastes. Nor do we know what types of programming are likely to be most appealing to different tastes.

Finally, our review of the literature suggests that one key to deepening individuals' level of involvement with the arts is to instill in them a greater commitment to the arts so that the arts become central to who they are. But how to accomplish this is also unclear. Despite the best efforts of scores of institutions and dedicated individuals and the investment of uncounted dollars, participation-building remains a very difficult and not very well understood task.

Inadequacy of Conceptual Approaches

Although these knowledge gaps may be frustrating to institutions attempting to design and implement participation-building strategies, they are probably inevitable. Neither policymakers nor practitioners are ever likely to have complete information on which to base their decisions. A more important—and potentially remediable—problem is the apparent failure of most theoretical approaches to capture the complexity of the process people go through in deciding whether to participate in the arts.

The empirical literature points out this complexity in several ways. For example, the very diversity of participation rates both by form of participation and by type of art suggests that the factors driving these rates are not straightforward. Similarly, despite the prominence given to socio-demographic factors in most empirical studies of participation patterns, the literature suggests (as discussed earlier) that arts participation can be better explained if participants are sorted into three basic categories: those who participate rarely (if at all), those who participate occasionally, and those who participate frequently. Moreover, socio-

demographic variables do not appear to be closely correlated with differences in frequency of participation once these three behavioral categories are distinguished from each other. In other words, although the more highly educated individuals are more likely than others to participate frequently, education appears to play little role in explaining why some frequent participants participate so much more than others do (Schuster, 1991). Finally, the very diversity of the reasons individuals give for their decisions to participate suggests that the reasons are complex. Yet this complexity is not generally reflected in the theoretical literature, a fact that limits this literature's utility for practitioners.

Consider, for example, the fact that the theoretical literature implicitly treats the participation decision as dichotomous—i.e., as if one simply decided to participate or not to participate. The diversity of responses that individuals give for their participation decisions suggests that this does not happen, that people actually go through a series of different considerations when deciding whether to participate. They are likely, for example, to first consider whether the arts have anything to offer them. They then consider what the benefits are and where they are likely to find them. They might then consider different, specific opportunities to participate, such as attending a play or visiting an art museum. Finally, if they do end up participating, they are likely to evaluate their experience and subsequently revise (for better or worse) their initial expectations about the benefits of the arts.

We do not mean to suggest here that all individuals proceed in a linear fashion through all these steps. Much of the explanatory power of the behavioral distinction between rare, occasional, and frequent participants derives from the likelihood that these groups will be at different stages in the decisionmaking process. Frequent participants are already convinced that the arts are important to them and thus will focus on which events to choose. For those who are rare participants, consideration of which event to attend is not really relevant unless they somehow become convinced that the arts have something to offer them. A further complication in this decisionmaking process is introduced for individuals who participate not because of having come to a decision along the usual pathway but because a friend or relative has invited them to do so. Their decision may have less to do with the arts than with their relationship with the individual who invited them. Whether they participate in the future, however, will hinge at least in part on their participation experience.

The central point here is not the exact steps in the decisionmaking process but the fact that more than one decision is involved. Moreover, different factors are likely to determine the outcome of each of these decisions, and the influence of these

factors is unlikely to be apparent if the process is not disaggregated. Perhaps the clearest example of why this disaggregation is important is the considerable variation found in the literature on how such economic constraints as ticket prices affect participation behavior. If, as we believe, ticket prices are relevant only for individuals already intending to attend, then estimating how prices will affect participation in the total population (as is implicitly done when a study regards participation as a dichotomous choice) will yield an inaccurate picture of pricing effects.

By oversimplifying the decision process, the theoretical literature fails to provide much guidance to arts institutions trying to decide which strategies to use to increase participation. In this context, the critical issue is determining which tactics are appropriate for which target populations (i.e., for those already participating, inclined to participate but not currently doing so, and not inclined to participate) and when to employ those tactics. For example, adjusting price levels in order to spur participation among individuals not inclined to participate in the first place, as many organizations do, is not likely to be very effective. An effective tactic in this case must deal with showing these people what benefits the arts offer them.

A second problem with the participation literature is its primary focus on objective, socio-demographic factors in explaining participation behavior.[3] As already noted, these factors do not explain why some individuals with a given set of background characteristics are frequent participants and others are not. The focus on socio-demographic factors rather than on the factors that motivate participants provides little help to arts institutions, since institutions typically have little or no way to influence background characteristics, including education.

Finally, by stressing socio-demographic factors, the conceptual models give too little attention to behavioral differences in participation, which in many ways seem to be the key to understanding participation decisions. In focusing on background factors, which institutions have little ability to modify, the conceptual models divert attention from contextual factors that institutions *can* modify, e.g., how they advertise their message, the types of programming they offer, and the tactics they employ to increase participation.

As this discussion has emphasized, the empirical and theoretical literatures provide more information about the frequency, form, and correlates of arts

[3]Most of the organizations we surveyed indicated that they identified target populations and designed strategies for those populations in terms of demographic characteristics alone.

participation than information on how to affect that behavior. By oversimplifying the decisionmaking process and stressing socio-economic correlates rather than motivations, the literature often provides too little guidance to practitioners seeking to change behavior. In the next chapter, we turn to a third type of literature that is specifically directed at practitioners and review the lessons it provides. [4]

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4. The Practitioner Literature

Practitioners who are seeking ways to increase participation in the arts need to know more than simply who participates, how they participate, and why; they also need to understand how to influence participation behavior. Yet, as noted in Chapter 3, the empirical and theoretical literatures on arts participation do not provide an adequate guide for arts organizations, funders, and other practitioners who need practical information on ways to increase individual participation. There are several reasons for this. First, the empirical and theoretical literatures are typically targeted at technical and academic audiences and are thus written in language that is not very accessible for nontechnical audiences. Second, as noted earlier, the existing conceptual approaches to participation tend to oversimplify the nature of the decisionmaking process and to overemphasize the socio-demographic correlates of participation rather than discussing the types of behavioral levers that practitioners might actually use to influence participation behavior. Third, the theoretical and empirical literatures are typically focused on generalizing from individual circumstances to broad behavioral patterns rather than on identifying the idiosyncratic circumstances that characterize the real world and with which arts organizations must deal to influence participation.

Fortunately, there is a growing literature on participation written specifically for practitioners. This literature offers both information and practical suggestions. Several features define the practitioner literature: First, it is written in a style that is easily understood by nontechnical audiences; second, it is specifically aimed at practitioners and thus focuses on answering "how to" questions; third, consistent with the previous point, it contains numerous examples, such as institutional case studies, that demonstrate and apply the central points in specific circumstances.

In selecting citations from the practitioner literature, we restricted our scope to items that deal principally with participation issues. As a result, we do not include the much larger body of work that may include discussions of participation issues but is aimed at addressing a broader set of nonprofit arts management issues. We focus on three types of studies:

- General strategies and broad approaches to expanding participation.

- Specific examples of tactics that have been used by actual organizations to increase participation.
- Studies on collecting and disseminating information.

We use the term *strategies* to refer to broad participation goals and the philosophy behind participation-building approaches. *Tactics,* on the other hand, are specific practices employed to pursue those goals. Admittedly, there is some overlap between studies of strategies and studies of tactics. Many discussions of strategies include examples of tactics, and many studies of tactics describe them in the context of general approaches to participation-building. However, these two types of studies tend to differ in their emphasis. Finally, *information collection and dissemination* plays a critical role in both strategy development and evaluation of the tactics institutions use to implement such strategies.

Institutional Strategies for Building Participation

The literature on strategic approaches toward increasing participation in the arts has been evolving over the past few decades as arts organizations have devoted increasing attention to that task. The initial approaches tended to focus on marketing strategies that might build attendance and provide a more regular earnings stream. These approaches, however, are better suited to attracting existing audiences than to attracting individuals who are not already inclined to participate. Subsequently, emphasis was placed on methods to increase individuals' attachments to specific arts organizations. Other approaches have tended to focus on ways to engage both potential and current participants in the artistic experience and the need to target strategies to achieve this goal toward different groups. Most recently, attention has turned to how and why arts organizations should align their participation-building strategies with their organizational structure, mission, and environment.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, strategies for building participation emphasized "marketing the arts" with more-sophisticated promotional techniques and targeting strategies. Preeminent examples of such works are Newman (1983) and Mellilo (1983). Newman's strategy for audience development emphasizes the importance of season subscriptions as a way to both expand audiences and provide earnings stability. He describes a variety of methods for converting every sort of participant—from single-ticket buyers, to students, to underserved populations—into arts subscribers. Mellilo describes the marketing experiences of about two dozen practitioners to provide examples of how performing arts organizations should market themselves.

However, by the mid-1980s, practitioners realized that subscriptions and other marketing techniques had captured the bulk of the people who were already inclined to participate. To attract entirely new types of participants, organizations needed to develop a variety of new strategies. From this perspective, the central challenge for most arts organizations was to determine how to deepen the involvement of individuals—both current participants and others—with the arts organization.

Morison and Dalgleish (1987) provide one of the most useful treatments of the issues involved in this challenge. They caution against the single-minded pursuit of subscribers or other up-front commitments. Instead they advocate a long-term strategy comprising stepping stones that gradually increase participants' involvement in the life of the arts organization. In this sense, they build on the observation that the strongest supporters of arts organizations are those who become part of a particular arts organization's community. The stepping-stone strategy combines approaches designed to first attract new participants, then expand their involvement and broaden their program interests through a variety of learning experiences that increase their knowledge of the arts and their commitment to specific institutions. Morison and Dalgleish provide numerous examples of how this might be accomplished.

More recently, attention has been devoted to strategies for connecting individuals (at a variety of levels of interest and involvement) with the arts as well as with specific arts organizations (e.g., Thorn and McDaniel, 1997; Kotler and Kotler, 1998; McCarthy and Jinnett, 2001). Thorn and McDaniel propound the concept of "learning consciousness" as a unifying principle for participation-building strategies. They argue that building participation hinges on developing individuals' personal contact with the arts. Given the variation among individuals, the key to this process is to match the nature of the experience to the skill and knowledge level of the participant.

Kotler and Kotler discuss different engagement strategies for museums. Like Thorn and McDaniel, they emphasize that an individual's experience with art should be at the center of the engagement process. For them, the "museum experience" is the key outcome of the museum visit. Drawing upon both their marketing and museum expertise, Kotler and Kotler discuss a wide range of issues facing museums today to demonstrate the interdependence of mission, audience, and funding. They describe the strategies and tools museums can use to build audiences, outlining the processes for formulating a set of objectives and strategy. Their comprehensive coverage of the use of marketing tools relevant to museums is the only work of its kind.

McCarthy and Jinnett (2001) emphasize that effective engagement strategies are *targeted* strategies, and they stress the need for institutions to align the approaches they use with their participation goals and the populations they target. This approach is based on a behavioral framework that asserts that the decision to participate consists of a series of separate decisions or stages, that different factors affect the outcomes at each of these stages, and that individuals will be at different stages in the decisionmaking process, depending on their inclination toward and experience with the arts. McCarthy and Jinnett note, for example, that institutions can build participation in three different ways: by attracting individuals who are not generally inclined to participate (diversifying), by attracting individuals who are inclined to the arts but are not currently participating in an institution's programs (broadening), and by deepening the level of involvement among current participants (deepening). Each of these goals is directed at a different target population and thus requires institutions to use a different approach.

Because arts institutions have limited resources and competing demands, they must adopt strategic approaches that align with their particular participation-building activities. In other words, in choosing their participation goals and the approaches they will use to achieve those goals, institutions must consider how their participation activities fit with their overall purpose and mission, their available resources, and the community environments in which they operate. In addition, they must recognize that participation-building is a challenging process, and that they will in all likelihood need to modify their approaches as they gain experience. They should begin with an initial planning phase and then evaluate and modify their plans as their experience warrants.

Useful summaries of such strategies (as well as descriptions of specific tactics that have been used) can be found in Yoshitomi (2000) and on a new Web site devoted to participation-building research, strategies, and tactics (http://www.arts4allpeople.org), established by the Wallace–Reader's Digest Funds.

Specific Tactics to Increase Participation

A much broader body of work reports on participation-building techniques that specific institutions have used in different institutional contexts and artistic disciplines. This literature is more difficult to summarize because much of it is discipline-specific and it comes from a wide range of sources. Although the "best practices" described are not necessarily appropriate to every organization, this

literature provides a rich collection of case studies to inspire and guide the design and implementation of tactics.

Notable participation-building studies include Falk (1995) for museums, Levine (1997) for dance, Mealor (1994) for literary magazines, and Robinson (1998) and Miller (1989) for theater. Falk presents a framework of demographic, psychographic, personal, cultural, and environmental variables that could affect potential museum participants' responsiveness to various marketing tactics (e.g., mainstream media advertising, peer-group contact, providing a welcoming environment) and describes specific tactics that museums might employ to exploit those variables. Although Falk focuses on museums, his study has broad applicability to arts organizations in other disciplines as well. For the performing arts in general, Kotler and Scheff (1987) provide an excellent sourcebook with an abundance of case studies. They address tactics ranging from community education and outreach to volunteer-development, marketing, and resource-sharing.

Journals on specific art fields are another rich source of specific, contemporary, case studies. These journals include *Dance Magazine, Museum News, ARTnews, Theater, Modern Drama, Grantmakers in the Arts,* and *Theater Management Journal.* By its very nature, however, this literature is difficult to track, since it is evolving constantly and is spread across a wide variety of disciplines (Phillips, 1999).

Journal articles help practitioners answer such questions as, How can a symphony orchestra find, train, and keep volunteers? How can it involve them successfully in institutional marketing (Gehret, 1997)? How might a symphony redesign its programming to attract new audiences? Can music organizations use media and the Internet to win back audiences (Spich and Sylvester, 1999)? Practitioners in a given field tend to be familiar with the journals in their own discipline, but they can also benefit from reading across disciplinary lines to learn from organizations that are of similar size or have similar target populations or operating environments.

Finally, several volumes describing the tactics organizations have used to increase participation have been published by the Wallace–Reader's Digest Funds. These publications include *Building Audiences* (1997), a report that assists theaters in attracting diverse audiences; *Opening the Door to the Entire Community* (1998), a report that presents case studies of museums that have used their collections in new ways to attract visitors; and *Engaging the Entire Community* (1999), a report designed to help museums use their collections in new ways to attract visitors. The Council of Literary Magazines and Presses Monograph series, also published by the Wallace–Reader's Digest Funds, includes such titles

as "How Does a Literary Publisher Conduct an Effective Bookstore Promotion?" (Bielenberg, 1994) and "How Can the Small Staff of a Literary Magazine Use Direct Mail to Develop Circulation?" (Sterner, 1994).

Recently, the Funds supported the preparation of a detailed guide on expanding participation for all types of arts organizations (Connolly and Cady, forthcoming). This comprehensive step-by-step handbook on the *process* of expanding participation is a useful companion to the aforementioned publications on specific tactics. It begins with guidelines for forming a planning committee, committing the organization to audience development, and assessing the organization's readiness in the preparatory stages. Using many examples from the experiences of arts organizations, the handbook proceeds through the goal-setting, strategy-development, resource-development, and evaluation phases. It includes worksheets and sample forms related to different stages of participation-building, such as assessing community relations, assessing organizational strengths and weaknesses vis-à-vis expanding participation, and developing audience-building strategies.

Collecting and Disseminating Information

Information is critical to the design and implementation of effective engagement strategies. This information must flow both from potential and current participants to arts organizations and from arts organizations to those individuals. Arts organizations need information about target populations if they are to design and implement effective engagement strategies. Similarly, potential and current participants need information about arts organizations if they are to make informed choices about arts participation (McCarthy and Jinnett, 2001).

By and large, the literature on information needs focuses on the variety of ways institutions can collect information and the pitfalls to avoid in that process. McCarthy and Jinnett, however, discuss the different types of information that organizations need and why that information is needed. Consistent with their focus on the need for targeted engagement strategies, they suggest that organizations need three kinds of information about participants: (1) information about the target population's inclination toward the arts, (2) information about the motivations of people who are inclined to participate, and (3) information about the lifestyles, specific program interests, and leisure activities of potential participants and how those individuals stay informed about their leisure activities.

Since different participation-building strategies are called for, depending upon the stage at which target populations are in the decisionmaking process,

institutions need to know whether target populations are disinclined, inclined but not participating, or already participants. Individuals who are inclined to participate are likely to consider many issues before actually deciding to participate (e.g., what forms their participation should take, what disciplines it should involve, which institutions to choose). Correspondingly, devising effective engagement strategies for attracting these individuals requires information about their motivations—whether they are looking for entertainment or enrichment, and whether they are more likely to prefer self-focused or social activities. Information on the lifestyles, program interests, and leisure activities of potential participants and the ways in which they stay informed about their leisure activities can enable arts organizations to adapt their programming, scheduling, pricing, and marketing efforts to the specific needs of this population.

The literature on ways to gather this information is fairly extensive. Several of the works in the list of citations at the end of this chapter contain information relevant to that task, including RMC (1997), National Endowment for the Arts (1995), and Gardiner and Collins (1992). The RMC volume provides an especially useful step-by-step guide to audience research. The NEA volume on arts participation research also provides a helpful summary of various approaches, techniques, and uses of arts participation research for practitioners, punctuated by examples from arts organizations' experiences. It provides extensive instructions on determining sample size, identifying biases, boosting response rates, designing survey instruments, preparing data for analysis, and finally, reporting the results. Gardiner and Collins focus on survey design, reviewing such choices as interviews vs. self-completion questionnaires, sampling across time vs. exhaustive coverage, and qualitative vs. quantitative research. Drawing on lessons learned from audience research conducted for the West End theaters in London, they describe the feasibility and tradeoffs of each approach.

In addition, a number of studies published by trade and affiliated groups discuss information-gathering techniques for specific disciplines. A good example of this type of study is Dillehay (1994), which explains why it is important to conduct reader surveys and how a literary press or magazine can go about developing such a survey. Walsh (1991) provides an example of the focus-group technique applied to the museum context.

Other studies of this type present reviews and comparisons of previous data-collection efforts that can augment the practical advice of the studies noted above. A more technical treatment of audience studies in the performing and visual arts, DiMaggio et al. (1978), summarizes the major contributions of such studies, discusses some of the methodological difficulties in designing audience

surveys, and describes how audience studies have been used. Although it is now somewhat dated, this study remains influential. A more recent review of arts participation studies and techniques by Petit (1997) contains brief descriptions of surveys in the performing and visual arts as well as the literary arts. While Petit's review is not a practical guide for organizations designing their own data-collection efforts, it enables these organizations to compare the data that others have collected in the past.

As noted above, just as arts organizations need information about current and potential participants, participants need information about arts organizations and what they have to offer. The types of information needed, however, may vary depending on where the targeted individuals are in the decisionmaking process (McCarthy and Jinnett, 2001). Those not inclined to participate in the arts must be convinced that the arts will provide some benefit to them. They need information that makes them conscious of the arts and their benefits. People inclined to participate but not currently doing so need to be persuaded to sample an arts organization's offerings. For this group, organizations need to provide basic information about the activities they offer, including times, places, and prices. In addition, they need to market their activities in a way that links the activities to potential participants' specific interests.

Finally, those who are already participating need to be convinced to increase their level of involvement. The key here is to make the participation experience as enjoyable and rewarding as possible by increasing the participants' understanding and knowledge of the arts.

Focusing on the information needs of participants is only part of the information picture. The effectiveness of outreach strategies hinges on both the substance of the message conveyed and how that message is delivered. Information channels differ not only in their ability to reach different populations but also in their credibility. Morison and Dalgleish (1987) discuss the merits of different dissemination strategies and offer some useful ways to distinguish among the reach and credibility of alternative channels. McCarthy and Jinnett (2001) report the results of a survey they conducted on the ways different arts organizations disseminate information to participants, including those organizations' ratings of the effectiveness of different techniques.

In addition to the publications cited above, conferences, email exchanges, on-line discussion groups, and a host of other informal exchanges provide practitioners with ideas, guidelines, and specific tools for developing strategies, designing appropriate tactics, and collecting data aimed at expanding involvement in the arts. Practitioners may also consult the Web sites of arts service organizations,

such as Opera America (http://www.operaam.org), Symphony Orchestra Institute (http://www.soi.org), Dance/USA (http://www.danceusa.org), Theatre Communications Group (http://www.tcg.org/), American Association of Museums (http://www.aam-us.org), and the American Association of Art Museum Directors (http://www.AAMD.org); advocacy groups, such as Arts in America (http://www.artsusa.org/); and research centers, such as the Center for Arts and Culture (http://www.culturalpolicy.org/). ArtsWire is an Internet-based network of resources for arts organizations, including an on-line publication, *Current*. This practical advice—whether from published articles and studies, Web sites, or conversations with staff of other arts organizations—is increasingly important as arts organizations seek new and innovative ways to build cultural participation.

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